

01-GS-43 VOTED: The Twenty-Third General Synod adopts the resolution "Access to Excellent Public Schools: A Child's Right in the 21st Century."

ACCESS TO EXCELLENT PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A CHILD'S CIVIL RIGHT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

WHEREAS The National Education Association in its 2000-2001 resolution process declared "that public education is the cornerstone of our social, economic, and political structure and is of utmost significance in the development of our moral, ethical, spiritual, and cultural values"; and

WHEREAS the Children's Defense Fund declared that "equal educational opportunity is a myth in millennia! America," and that "overall, America's children are not being educated to the high levels they have a right to expect"; and

WHEREAS thirteen million-or one in five- American children live in poverty,<sup>3</sup> the overwhelming majority of whom attend schools that receive inequitable and inadequate school funding due to the dependence of poor school districts on limited property taxes to support public education; and

WHEREAS these school districts, out of ignorance and racism, tend to marginalize children and families who are not of the dominant culture; and

WHEREAS the public school population of students whose first language is other than English continues to increase, thus placing even more stress on struggling school districts; and

WHEREAS there is a severe shortage of well-qualified teachers, particularly in rural and urban areas, which further perpetuates injustice in the public school system; and

WHEREAS the propensity of the popular press is to bash public schools, public school teachers, and poor families, encouraging the latter to settle for false promises and over-simplistic "solutions" such as vouchers; and

WHEREAS funding for Title I and Title VII of the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which benefits poor children and the schools that serve them, is in severe jeopardy;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-third General Synod of the United Church of Christ:

calls on the United Church of Christ in all its settings to proclaim public school support and advocacy for the same as one of the foremost civil rights issues in the twenty-first century;

urges local churches, Associations, and Conferences, consistent with previous actions taken by the Fifteenth General Synod in 1985, "Pronouncement on Public Education," and the Eighteenth General Synod in 1991, "Support of Quality Integrated Education for All Children in Public Schools," to call on local, state and federal governments to enact and enforce laws and policies that support a public education system that provides each child with an equal educational opportunity;

urges local churches to recruit new and uphold existing public educators, students, parents, school boards, and community leaders as activists for the civil right to excellent public education for all children;

encourages local churches and their individual members to take an active role in their local public schools, through church sponsored tutoring, after school activities, mentoring, book drives, or other such support activities as their local public schools may immediately need. Further encourages local churches to identify, become educated about, and work to eliminate systemic barriers to excellent public education for all.

requests that Justice and Witness Ministries convene a cross-covenanted ministries Public Education Task Force to engage all parts of the wider church in the work that the AMA/CRJ Public Education Task Force began.

requests that this Task Force, in collaboration with the Justice and Witness Ministries, Local Church Ministries, and the Proclamation, Identity, and Communications Team, convene at least once yearly to visit public schools and reflect on their findings for church-wide discernment;

calls on this Task Force to work with the Ministry for Youth and Young Adult Empowerment to develop youth leadership for public school transformation;

calls on the United Church of Christ Research Department, along with this Task Force, to launch a denomination-wide survey to identify and prioritize challenges public schools face, to which the United Church of Christ may respond;

calls on this Task Force to develop an umbrella coalition across the thirty-nine Conferences of the United Church of Christ, comprised of clergy and lay persons, public school educators, parents, students, and civic activists to support public school justice, parent involvement, and equitable public school financing;

calls on this Task Force to report to the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth General Synods on its progress, including identifying systemic barriers to excellent public education and recommending strategies to address those barriers.

funding for this action will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.